

Message Text

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ORIGIN SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 CCO-00 /031 R

DRAFTED BY INR: DELONG/DEMARK

APPROVED BY INR:DEMARK

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL ACAPULCO IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

USINT DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 070279

EXDIS TOSEC 170

I.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, IS

SUBJECT: INR'S ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT ISRAELI GOVERNMENT

CRISIS AND ITS POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON SYRIAN-ISRAELI

DIENGAGEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

REF: STATE 69601

1. INR CONCURS WITH JUDGMENT IN REFTEL THAT MEIR-DAYAN GOVERNMENT HAS SOMEWHAT BETTER THAN EVEN CHANCE OF SURVIVING LATEST CRISIS. WE BASE THIS ON AWARENESS BY POLITICIANS OF GENERAL ISRAELI SENTIMENT AGAINST NEW ELECTIONS SO SOON AFTER LAST VOTE IN DECEMBER, AND ON UNDOUBTED ALL-OUT EFFORT WHICH MRS. MEIR WILL MAKE TO PATCH UP HER CABINET. IN SIMILAR PAST EXERCISES OF BRINKSMANSHIP BY CONTENDING ISRAELI LEADERS, SHE HAS ACHIEVED LAST MINUTE SUCCESSES, AND SHE WILL SURELY BE ABLE TO SCORE SOME POINTS BY INVOKING THE SENSE OF CONFIDENTIAL

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PATRIOTIC RESPONSIBILITY OF ALIGNMENT POLITICIANS TO AVOID

A FRATRICIDAL SHOWDOWN IN THE MIDST OF PRESENT ACUTE EXTERNAL DANGERS.

2. NONETHELESS, THE BALANCE WILL BE CLOSE, AND THE POSSIBILITY OF HER FAILURE IS CONSIDERABLE. THE KNESSET DEBATE ON THE AGRANAT REPORT BEGINS ON APRIL 11, AND, IF SHE HAS NOT TIED DOWN THE PRIMA DONNAS IN A NEW COMPROMISE UNDERSTANDING BY THEN, THE STRAINS OF AN UNINHIBITED DEBATE

ARE LIKELY TO TEAR HER OWN PARTY AND HER COALITION APART. AFTER ALL, IT WAS VERY TOUCH AND GO IN THE CABINET FORMATION PERIOD IN FEBRUARY-MARCH WHETHER DAYAN AND HIS RAFI FACTION WOULD REJOIN THE CABINET AND WHETHER THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY WOULD ACCEPT ANYTHING LESS THAN A GRAND COALITION WITH LIKUD. DAYAN IS NOW SMARTING UNDER ALL-OUT BLASTS FROM HIS LABOR "COLLEAGUES". HIS WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE IS UNDOUBTEDLY MINIMAL, AND HIS OPPONENTS HAVE CONSCIOUSLY PUT THEMSELVES OUT ON A LIMB FROM WHICH RETREAT WILL BE POLITICALLY PAINFUL. ONE "SOLUTION" WHICH MRS. MEIR IS APPARENTLY ALREADY FLOATING WOULD INVOLVE DAYAN'S TRANSFER TO ANOTHER MINISTRY INSTEAD OF DEFENSE, BUT IT IS TOO EARLY TO TELL HOW MUCH CHANCE THIS SCHEME FOR A RECONSTITUTED CABINET HAS.

3. IF MRS. MEIR SUCCEEDS ONCE MORE IN PUTTING A LID ON

THE SEETHING ANTAGONISMS WITHIN THE ALIGNMENT, THE GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY GO ON MUCH AS BEFORE. THIS WILL INCLUDE ITS HANDLING OF THE GOLAN NEGOTIATIONS, WHERE THE HARD DECISIONS WHICH WILL FACE THE CABINET ARE NOT, AT LEAST YET, THE SUBJECT OF MUCH FACTIONAL ACRIMONY. NOR SHOULD DAYAN'S STATUS AS AN ACTIVE PROponent OF SOME "SUITABLE" DISENGAGEMENT DEAL BE AFFECTED.

4. IF THE BUBBLING CAULDRON ESCAPES MRS. MEIR'S CONTROL, I.E., IF THE RAFI FACTION STICKS TO DAYAN AND IF THEIR SPLIT WITH THE OTHER ALIGNMENT LEADERS BECOMES IRREVERSIBLE, A NEW ELECTION SEEMS INEVITABLE. THE ARITHMETIC NEEDED FOR A LABOR-LED PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY WILL NOT STRETCH TO ALLOW ANY COALITION WITHOUT RAFI, EXCEPT AN CONFIDENTIAL

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ALL-PARTY REGIME, WHICH MRS. MEIR OR ALTERNATIVE PRIME MINISTERS FROM HER CAMP PLUS THEIR SUPPORTERS WILL NOT NOW BUY. (OF COURSE, DAYAN'S OPPONENTS WILL TRY TO ISOLATE HIM FROM HIS BACKERS AND TO INDUCE THE OTHER RAFI MEMBERS TO STICK TO MRS. MEIR FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR OWN FUTURES, BUT THIS IS A VERY PROBLEMATICAL TACTIC.) YET, A NEW ELECTION COULD NOT ONLY PROVE INCONCLUSIVE, BUT PERHAPS ALSO MARK A GENERATIONAL TURN IN THE INTERNAL

BALANCE AND LEADERSHIP OF THE LABOR-ALIGNMENT GROUPING,
WITH MRS. MEIR NO LONGER THE PARTY LEADER.

5. WHILE IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT THE MAKE-UP OF
ISRAEL'S POLITICAL STRUCTURE IN THE WAKE OF A NEW ELEC-
TION, IT IS CERTAIN THAT THE CAMPAIGN PERIOD WOULD BE

BITTER AND THAT FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT MIGHT AGAIN
BE PROLONGED. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS HARD TO
SEE HOW SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT THE GOLAN COULD BE
CARRIED FORWARD IN THE PRE-ELECTION PERIOD. INDEED, ANY
WILLINGNESS BY THE GOVERNMENT TO GIVE UP QUNAYTRA OR ANY
OTHER OCCUPIED SYRIAN TERRITORY OTHER THAN THE ADDITIONAL
SALIENT CONQUERED LAST OCTOBER COULD ITSELF BECOME A
HIGHLY EMOTIONAL ELECTION ISSUE, FOR WHICH THE BROADLY
APPROVED SUEZ DISENGAGEMENT TALKS LAST DECEMBER PROVIDE
NO VALID ANALOGY.

6. ANOTHER LABOR-LED GOVERNMENT AFTER THE VOTING,
WHOEVER THE PRIME MINISTER, WOULD PROBABLY BE PREPARED
TO RESUME DISENGAGEMENT EFFORTS WHERE MRS. MEIR HAD LEFT
OFF. HOWEVER, ISRAEL'S POLITICS ARE SO UNSETTLED THAT
THE PROSPECT THAT THE LABOR ALIGNMENT WOULD LOSE EVEN
MORE STRENGTH IS GOOD. INDEED, LIKUD COULD EMERGE AS
ABOUT AS STRONG AS LABOR, ESPECIALLY IF RAFI RAN ON A
SEPARATE LIST. NATURALLY, ANY GOVERNMENT IN WHICH LIKUD
HAD INFLUENCE WOULD PROBABLY STONEWALL AGAINST ANY GOLAN
"WITHDRAWAL", CERTAINLY BEYOND THE OCTOBER 1973
LINE.

7. IT IS QUITE UNLIKELY THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD
MAINTAIN EVEN THE PRESENT RAUCOUS STATUS QUO DURING
THE SEVERAL MONTH PERIOD OF ISRAELI DOMESTIC POLITICAL
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TURMOIL WHICH WOULD FOLLOW THE CALL FOR NEW ELECTIONS.
SYRIAN ACTIVISM WOULD NOT BE SIMPLY THE QUESTION OF
AN ATTEMPT BY DAMASCUS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A TIME OF
ISRAELI CONFUSION. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE HARD-LINE ANTI-
NEGOTIATION Factions IN SYRIA, WHOM ASAD HAS SEEMINGLY
SIDETRACKED FOR THE TIME BEING, WOULD SEIZE UPON IT AS
A NEW OPPORTUNITY TO DEFLECT HIM FROM HIS COURSE, OR PER-
HAPS TO OUST HIM. IN THESE CONDITIONS, THE PROBABILITY
OF A MAJOR AND FAIRLY EARLY SYRIAN ASSAULT AGAINST
ISRAELI FORCES ON THE GOLAN WOULD BE RATHER HIGH, AND
THE RISK THAT SUCH A MAJOR BREACH OF THE CEASEFIRE IF
NOT RAPIDLY RESTORED, COULD SPREAD TO OTHER ARAB-ISRAELI
FRONTS WOULD BE SUBSTANTIAL.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, COALITION GOVERNMENT, TREATY VIOLATION, TOSEC 170, POLITICAL SITUATION, PARTY PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTH, DISSIDENT Factions, ELECTIONS, PEACE TALKS, MILITARY OCCUPIED AREAS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974STATE070279
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: DELONG/DEMARK
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740079-0163
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740460/aaaaccxu.tel
Line Count: 169
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: STATE 69601
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <13-Aug-2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <11 FEB 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INR'S ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT ISRAELI GOVERNMENT CRISIS AND ITS POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON SYRIAN-ISRAELI
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, IS, SY, (DAYAN, MOSHE)
To: ACAPULCO
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005